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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [IS](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: NORWAY'S FINANCE MINISTER BACKS DOWN ON ISRAEL
BOYCOTT STATEMENT

REF: OSLO 19

Classified By: P/E Counselor Mike Hammer, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. On Friday, January 7 a shamed Kristin Halvorsen publicly apologized for her earlier comments supporting a boycott of Israeli goods and services. An unofficial translation of her comments is given below in paragraph 2. While all the major papers in Norway are united in their criticism of Halvorsen's actions and are glad that she and her party may have learned an important lesson about how to behave in government, anti-Israeli sentiment in Norway remains high. The incident clearly calls into question Norway's future role as a peace-broker in Middle East. End Summary.

12. (U) On January 7, Norwegian Finance Minister and junior Coalition party (SV) leader Kristin Halvorsen apologized for her statements on January 4 supporting her Socialist Left party's policy of boycotting Israel. "As Finance Minister I should not have spoken in favor of a policy towards Israel that is not in line with official Norwegian foreign policy. This has contributed to a lack of clarity and uncertainty about what Norwegian policy is in this area. I have apologized to the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister and the other Cabinet members. And I want to say this publicly as well, to contribute to clarity. As Finance Minister I must, especially because it concerns foreign policy questions, leave this (issue) to the Foreign Minister, because it's his responsibility, and keep myself to the official Norwegian policy. I cannot pursue or argue for actions or a policy that is in contradiction to what the majority in the government support.... My main public role is Finance Minister, and that means that I, in such delicate questions where SV has a different view than government policy, must shut my mouth." When asked if she would she would apologize to Israel, as demanded by some opposition party figures, Halvorsen responded, "I understand that this is a sensitive question for Israel. I therefore now make it clear that I do not advocate a different policy than that which is the government's line."

13. (U) Halvorsen's comments were the center of political debate in Norway over the weekend. All the major papers have criticized her for her earlier statements and hope that she and her party have learned a lesson as to how a government party and a minister need to behave. A party colleague reports that Halvorsen personally has been "absolutely devastated" by the consequences of her statement. Also, major dailies are reporting that senior political figures in the Prime Minister's office have compared Halvorsen's comments to pre-war anti-Semitic actions in Norway. Such painful allegations of anti-Semitism have forced SV to publicly say that the party's central board will reopen the question of whether or how to pursue a policy of boycotting Israel. However, anti-Israeli sentiment runs high in Norway; for example, over the weekend the youth wing of Labor Party told the press that it still believes that Israeli PM Sharon is a "war criminal."

14. (U) Halvorsen's comments also have reopened a debate about Norway's position with regard to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Many Norwegian commentators are anxious to point out that the uncertainty created by Halvorsen about Norwegian foreign policy call Norway's credibility as a peace broker into question. The Foreign Ministry is clearly hoping to put straight any questions about Norway's foreign policy, and even took the extraordinary step of releasing to the press Foreign Minister Stoere's letters to Israeli FM Shalom and Secretary Rice. However, much damage is already done and is

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probably irreversible. For example, the press is carrying comments by Norwegian Middle-East "experts" who say that the Foreign Minister has gone too far in shutting Halvorsen down and is pursuing a policy that is "servile" to Israel and against international law.

Comment
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15. (C) Intense pressure from PM Stoltenberg and FM Stoere,

as well as Washington's tough message on Halvorsen's outrageous comments, led to Halvorsen's retraction. A visibly frazzled Halvorsen went as far as one could hope, acknowledging that her support of a policy divergent from that of the government's was out of line. She has also learned a painful lesson and has been called to heel by Stoltenberg. She has not apologized to Israel, but has said that she will not in the future tout anything but the government's line.

16. (C) As soon as this 3-party coalition was formed, with the Socialist Left being in government for the first time, everyone expected something like this incident. Halvorsen needed reeling-in, and it is good that this painful episode has not focused on one of SV's many anti-US themes. Halvorsen and SV have been chastened and should be quieter for some time. We hope that this will make for some smoother sailing in our relations with the center-left Norwegian government, at least for while.

17. (C) Foreign Minister Stoere has tried hard to reassure the international community about the course of Norwegian foreign policy, but Halvorsen's antics have taken a high toll. As the after-shocks of Halvorsen's comments continue to rumble, and Norwegian anti-Israeli sentiment continues to be manifest, it is hard to see how the parties in the region can view Norway as unbiased in the future. Norway's reputation as an unbiased peace-monger certainly has taken a hit.

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